
a *Grace Notes* course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study

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Lesson 303: **Acts 15:30-41**

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Acts 15:30-41**Acts 15:30**

So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

The “committee” of four men left Jerusalem with the blessing of the church there, and journeyed to Antioch. There was probably a formal meeting of the church to send them on their way.

The four men had the letter from the elders in their hands. As soon as they reached Antioch, they discharged their duties, meeting with the whole congregation of the church there to formally deliver the letter by reading it to the people.

The Antioch church at this time had many members, probably counted in the thousands, made up of many small congregations meeting in homes and perhaps other buildings. It isn't known how many people came together in one place to hear the reading of this letter; but no doubt the whole Antioch believing community was informed in a very short time.

Acts 15:31

Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

What a relief it must have been for the Gentiles to learn that they would not have to be subject to the heavy burdens of the practices and ceremonies of the Jewish religion!

they rejoiced for the consolation

“Consolation” is **parakleisei**, which can mean either “exhortation” or “consolation”, depending on context. Exhortation this message surely was, but what rejoicing it caused! Robertson says, “Exhortation and consolation run together in this word.”

Acts 15:32

And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

being prophets also themselves

Judas and Silas had the spiritual gift of prophecy and the office of prophet. This phrase indicates that they had been preachers before they went to Antioch.

exhorted the brethren with many words

They would have had to speak many times in Antioch in order to teach all of the Christians the full meaning of the gracious provisions of the letter from Jerusalem, and giving them many useful instructions and exhortations.

and confirmed them

“Confirm” is **episterizontes**, which means “to make more firm; to establish; to give additional strength”. Establishing believers in the Christian life requires consistent regular teaching of the basic doctrines related to Christian spirituality and growth in grace.

In particular, the Gentile believers in Antioch need to be strengthened in the doctrines of Christian grace and liberty and freedom from the law of Moses, with which the false teachers wanted to burden them.

The establishing of new believers is the main purpose for which Paul and Barnabas want to re-visit the churches in Asia which they had so recently established.

Acts 15:33

And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

Judas and Silas remained in Antioch for some time, to continue their preaching ministry. They are employed by the Antioch church, so to speak, and after they had thoroughly taught the brethren there, the church released them to go back to their home in Jerusalem.

It's not certain how long they stayed in Antioch; some commentators say it probably would have been as long as one year. At least they stayed until the believers were thoroughly familiar with all the new grace doctrines.

They both were at liberty to depart, but Silas decided to stay on a little longer.

Acts 15:34

Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

This verse does not occur in some Greek manuscripts. Some commentators say that it was added in order to account for Silas' presence in Antioch when Paul selected him to accompany him on the 2nd missionary journey. (Acts 15:40). The Latin Vulgate reads (in English), "It seemed good to Silas to remain, but Judas went along to Jerusalem."

Nevertheless, there is no contradiction here. Although both Judas and Silas were released to return to Jerusalem, there is no reason Silas could not have decided to stay.

Acts 15:35

Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Paul and Barnabas took up again the work they were doing before they made their first missionary journey. (Acts 11:26; 13:1; 14:28) At that time Barnabas had gone to Tarsus to get Paul (Saul), and bring him to Antioch. They spent a year there at that time, meeting with the church and teaching "considerable numbers".

On this occasion also, they have a full ministry of teaching and preaching, and they do their work along with many others (including Silas) who were "preaching the word of the Lord" at the same time.

Among the number may have been the bishop-martyr Ignatius, who at this time was a young man.

The Confrontation of Paul with Peter

It is very likely that the confrontation of Peter by Paul which is described in Galatians 2:11-14 took place in Antioch before the Paul left on his second missionary journey.

Peter came up to see how things were going in Antioch after Paul's victory in Jerusalem. At first Peter mingled freely with the Greek Christians without the compunctions shown at Caesarea and for which he had to answer in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18). Rumours of Peter's conduct reached Jerusalem and the Judaizers saw a chance to reopen the controversy on the line of social customs, a matter not passed on at the Jerusalem Conference. These Judaizers threaten Peter with a new trial and he surrenders and is followed by Barnabas and all the Jewish brethren in Antioch to the dismay of Paul who boldly rebuked Peter and Barnabas and won them back to his view.¹

The following paragraphs are from Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, Chapter 7.

"It appears that Peter, having come to Antioch for some reason which is unknown to us, lived at first in free and unrestrained intercourse with the Gentile converts, meeting them in social friendship and eating with them, in full consistency with the spirit of the recent decree, and with his own conduct in the case of Cornelius. At this time certain Jewish brethren came" from James," who presided over the church at Jerusalem. Whether they were really sent on some mission by James, or we are merely to understand that they came from Jerusalem, they brought with them their old Hebrew repugnance against social intercourse with the uncircumcised; and Peter in their society began to vacillate. In weak compliance with their prejudices, he" withdrew and separated himself" from

¹ *ibid*, Acts 15:35.

those whom he had lately treated as brethren and equals in Christ.

“Just as in an earlier part of his life he had asserted his readiness to follow his Master to death, and then denied him through fear of a maid servant, so now, after publicly protesting against the notion of making any difference between the Jew and the Gentile, and against laying on the neck of the latter a yoke which the former had never been able to bear (Acts 15:9,10), we find him contradicting his own principles, and” through fear of those who were of the circumcision (Gal 2:12)” giving all the sanction of his example to the introduction of caste into the church of Christ.

“Such conduct could not fail to excite in Paul the utmost indignation. Peter was not simply yielding a non essential point, through a tender consideration for the consciences of others. This would have been quite in accordance with the principle asserted by his brother apostle, that” it is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbles, or is made weak.” Nor was this proceeding a prudent and innocent accommodation to circumstances, for the sake of furthering the Gospel, like Paul’s conduct in circumcising Timothy at Iconium (Acts 16:3); or, indeed, like the Apostolic Decree itself. Peter was acting under the influence of a contemptible and sinful motive, the fear of man: and his behavior was giving a strong sanction to the very heresy which was threatening the existence of the church, namely, the opinion that the observance of Jewish ceremonies was necessary to salvation!

“Nor was this all. Other Jewish Christians, as was naturally to be expected, were led away by his example; and even Barnabas, the chosen companion of Paul, who had been a witness and an actor in all the great transactions in Cyprus, in Pisidia, and Lycaonia, even Barnabas, the missionary

was” carried away” with the dissimulation of the rest (Gal. 2:13). When Paul was a spectator of such inconsistency, and perceived both the motive in which it originated and the results to which it was leading, he would have been a traitor to his Master’s cause, if he had hesitated (to use his own emphatic words) to rebuke Peter” before all,” and to” withstand him to the face.” (Gal. 2:11,14)”

Acts 15:36

And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

Paul sees the need to return to all those places he and Barnabas had visited (Acts 13 and 14), to water the seed they had planted. The new converts in those places, were surrounded with paganism and opposition; and there were no experienced teachers among them. “The precariousness of the life of new converts in pagan lands is shown in all of Paul’s epistles.”²

From Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, Chapter 7, Planning for the 2nd Missionary Journey.*

“This second missionary journey originated in a desire expressed by Paul to Barnabas, that they should revisit all the cities where they had preached the Gospel and founded churches (Acts 15:41). He felt that he was not called to spend a peaceful, though laborious, life at Antioch, but that his true work was `far off among the Gentiles.” (Acts 22:21) He knew that his campaigns were not ended, that, as the soldier of Jesus Christ, he must not rest from his warfare, but must `endure hardness,” that he might please Him who had called him.” (2 Tim. 2:3,4)

² Furneaux, Acts 15:35

“As a careful physician, he remembered that they, whose recovery from sin had been begun, might be in danger of relapse; or, to use another metaphor, and to adopt the poetical language of the Old Testament, he said, ‘Come, let us get up early to the vineyards: let us see if the vine flourish. The words actually recorded as used by Paul on this occasion, are these :’ ‘Come, let us turn back and visit our brethren in every city, where we have announced the word of the Lord, and let us see how they fare.’”

“We notice here, for the first time, a trace of that tender solicitude concerning his converts, that earnest longing to behold their faces, which appears in the letters which he wrote afterwards, as one of the most remarkable, and one of the most attractive, features of his character. Paul was the speaker, and not Barnabas. Paul thought doubtless of the Pisidians and Lycaonians, as he thought afterwards at Athens and Corinth of the Thessalonians, from whom he had been lately taken, in presence not in heart, endeavoring to see their face with great desire night and day praying exceedingly that he might see their face, and might perfect that which was lacking in their faith (1 Thess. 2:17; 3:19). He was” not ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Cor. 2:11).

“He feared lest by any means the Tempter had tempted them, and his labor had been in vain (1 Thess. 3:5). He” stood in doubt of them,” and desired to be” present with them” once more (Gal. 4:20). His wish was to revisit every city where converts had been made. We are reminded here of the importance of continuing a religious work when once begun. We have had the institution of presbyters (Acts 15:23), and of councils (Acts 15), brought before us in the sacred narrative; and now we have an example of that system of church visitation, of the happy effects of which we have still some experience, when we see weak resolutions strengthened, and expiring faith

rekindled, in confirmations at home, or in missionary settlements abroad.”

Acts 15:37

And Barnabas determined to take John Mark with them.

It seems here that Mark had come from Jerusalem with them to Antioch; or perhaps he traveled with Peter later. Remember that Barnabas and Mark were cousins (Col. 4:10). Barnabas may not have felt as strongly as Paul had when Mark decided to return home from Pamphylia. Barnabas obviously wanted to give Mark another chance to prove himself.

Acts 15:38

But Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

“Why John Mark left his brethren at Pamphylia we are not informed; possibly he went to visit his pious mother Mary at Jerusalem, and to see Peter, to whom he is supposed to have been much attached. It certainly was not with the approval of Paul that he left them at this place; yet his departure does not seem to have merited the displeasure of Barnabas”.³

Acts 15:39

And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed from one another: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

Comments on this verse are from Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, Chapter 8, Separation of Paul and Barnabas.*

“This plan, however, of a combined visitation of the churches was marred by an outbreak of human infirmity. The two apostolic friends were separated from each other by a quarrel,

³ Clarke, Acts 13:13

which proved that they were indeed, as they had lately told the Lystrians," men of like passions" with others (Acts 14:15). Barnabas was unwilling to undertake the journey unless he were accompanied by his relation Mark. Paul could not consent to the companionship of one who "departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work:" (Acts 15:38) and neither of them could yield his opinion to the other.

"This quarrel was much more closely connected with personal feelings than that which had recently occurred between St. Peter and St. Paul. It is unwise to be overanxious to dilute the words of Scripture, and to exempt even Apostles from blame. By such criticism we lose much of the instruction which the honest record of their lives was intended to convey.

"We are taught by this scene at Antioch, that a good work may be blessed by God, though its agents are encompassed with infirmity, and that changes, which are violent in their beginnings, may be overruled for the best results. Without attempting to balance too nicely the faults on either side, our simplest course is to believe that, as in most quarrels, there was blame with both. Paul's natural disposition was impetuous and impatient, easily kindled to indignation, and (possibly) overbearing.

"Barnabas had shown his weakness when he yielded to the influence of Peter and the Judaizers (Gal. 2:13). The remembrance of the indirect censure he then received may have been perpetually irritated by the consciousness that his position was becoming daily more and more subordinate to that of the friend who rebuked him. Once he was spoken of as chief of those "prophets at Antioch," among whom Saul was the last: now his name was scarcely heard, except when he was mentioned as the companion of Paul.

"In short, this is one of those quarrels in which, by placing ourselves in imagination on the one side and the other, we can alternately

justify both, and easily see that the purest Christian zeal, when combined with human weakness and partiality, may have led to the misunderstanding.

"How could Paul consent to take with him a companion who would really prove an embarrassment and a hindrance? Such a task as that of spreading the Gospel of God in a hostile world needs a resolute will and an undaunted courage. And the work is too sacred to be put in jeopardy by any experiments. Mark had been tried once and found wanting. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

"And Barnabas would not be without strong arguments to defend the justice of his claims. It was hard to expect him to resign his interest in one who had cost him much anxiety and many prayers. His dearest wish was to see his young kinsman approving himself as a missionary of Christ. Now, too, he had been won back to a willing obedience, he had come from his home at Jerusalem, he was ready now to face all the difficulties and dangers of the enterprise. To repel him in the moment of his repentance was surely "to break a bruised reed" and to "quench the smoking flax"

"It is not difficult to understand the obstinacy with which each of the disputants, when his feelings were once excited, clung to his opinion as to a sacred truth. The only course which now remained was to choose two different paths and to labor independently; and the Church saw the humiliating spectacle of the separation of its two great missionaries to the Heathen. We cannot, however, suppose that Paul and Barnabas parted, like enemies, in anger and hatred. It is very likely that they made a deliberate and amicable arrangement to divide the region of their first mission between them, Paul taking the continental, and Barnabas the insular, part of the proposed visitation.

“Of this at least we are certain, that the quarrel was overruled by Divine Providence to a good result. One stream of missionary labor had been divided, and the regions blessed by the waters of life were proportionally multiplied. St. Paul speaks of Barnabas afterwards as of an Apostle actively engaged in his Master's service. We know nothing of the details of his life beyond the moment of his sailing for Cyprus; but we may reasonably attribute to him not only the confirming of the first converts, but the full establishment of the Church in his native island.”

Acts 15:40,41

And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

The churches in Syria and Cilicia were not on Paul's first itinerary, but he visited them on his way to Asia Minor.

Antioch was the main city of Syria, so the Syrian churches might have been established by Paul and Barnabas, or other prophets.

The churches in Cilicia may have been established by Paul when he was in Tarsus prior to coming to Antioch the first time.

confirming the churches

That is, strengthening them by instruction and exhortation, and perhaps appointing pastors (as in Titus 1).
